

Prologue

The Chinese philosopher and general SUNZI (SUN TSU) already stated 2500 years ago in one of the most important strategy works to date (*On the Art of War*):

"If you know the enemy and yourself, you need not fear the outcome of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, you will suffer defeat for every victory you win. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will fail in every single battle."

It was precisely under these conditions that Germany had to fight in the East in 1943-45 against an opponent who was materially far superior. STALIN, on the other hand, was able to assume the role of a player, as in a card game, whose own cards could be kept face down while the opponent's hand lay face up on the table, unbeknownst to that player.

Germany's leadership was repeatedly misled not only about their opponent, but also about their own strengths and weaknesses

Introduction

1943-45: "Sword beats shield" - it only because of the Russian superiority?

The completion of the second volume of *Betrayal on the Eastern Front* has taken somewhat more time than the author intended. In order to avoid errors and misreporting, a vast amount of material had to be evaluated and gaps filled. The present work thus represents probably the most complete overview - as long as no access to the secret archives of the victorious powers can be made.

This book deals with the background of gigantic struggle from the fall of the 6th Army at Stalingrad to the surrender of Wehrmacht on May 8, 1945, little understood and swept under the table by "modern historians".

Stalingrad quickly became a legend and remains so to this day. It thus occupies a special place among all the bloody carnage of the Second World War. Indeed, the city on the Volga symbolizes the psychological turning point of the war. However, the battle did not have a war-deciding significance.

The Red Army still had to deal with Wehrmacht as an extremely serious opponent. Marshal ZHUKOV's general attack ">Uranus<" had failed after Stalingrad with the worst losses for the Russians. VON MANSTEIN'S counteroffensives in March 1943 in the area around Kharkov then made it clear that the Germans had lost an important battle on the Volga, but by no means the war. A draw up to an equalizing peace between STALIN and HITLER stood as a way out for the German and Russian people! Not everyone on the German side agreed with this.

The Wehrmacht was still clawing its way deep into Soviet territory. Their tactical experience and the technical resources HITLER'S armies in 1943 provided them with greater fighting power than at the time of their triumphs against Western European opponents in 1940.

Nevertheless, the Russian sword overpowered the German shield. The share of the Western Allies in the downfall of the Third Reich, on the other hand, was much smaller than is claimed today by Anglo-American historiography.

This ultimately total Russian victory is today usually explained "the extraordinary numerical superiority of the enemy both in formations and of material", as General VON MANSTEIN already wrote.

In >modern< historiography, Germany's defeat is often interpreted in a 'politically correct' way, namely as the result of German mistakes -

HITLER'S poor strategic understanding, sloppy enemy reconnaissance, logistical overstretch and the like. Some of this may be true, some of it is distorted or, even as a clumsy lie of convenience hardly made more true by massive repetition

Nor was the German Eastern Army simply overrun by Indians like an American prairie settler trek, nor did the Red Army win only because the enemy ran out of strength. This book seeks to find the missing explanations

From the suspected spy in the Führer's headquarters >Werther< to the role of technical means of reconnaissance (ULTRA/Enigma), it is time to destroy the cherished dogmas of both the first postwar decades and >modern< MGFA historians

Who would have thought, for example, that the Allied ULTRA decoding successes decisive for the war would have been over before they could really begin without the connivance of high-ranking German officers? This and many other facts up to mysterious airplane crashes and hijackings deserve to be uncovered objectively and unsparingly.

In fact, even at the end of the war Soviet losses of personnel and materiel reached astronomical proportions. Especially 1945, the tank losses of the Soviets against the dying German Reich were similarly high in the Russian near-catastrophe as in 1941. Far more red tanks were lost in Silesia, in Unagm and in front of Berlin than the Soviet large-scale industrial complexes could produce new ones

The conquest of the province of East Prussia alone from January to April 1945 officially cost the lives of 584,000 Red Army soldiers.

Economically, STALIN'S empire achieved only a Pyrrhic victory in 1941-45. As a result of the struggle against the Third Reich waging a desperate three-front war the Soviet economy shrank by twenty percent, according to estimates by U.S. experts. The damage caused by the victorious >Great Patriotic War< in Russia in many areas was, in the early sixties.

The losses have not yet been fully made up for. Radiant winners look different

But if neither Soviet material and personnel superiority, HITLER'S - strategic errors, nor inferior German fighting strength can provide an explanation for the Soviet victory over the Third Reich, there must have been factors, denied to this day, intervened decisively in the events of the war and tipped the scales in Russia's favor. These include betrayal on a not inconsiderable scale. Much of what is explained to the public today as "imprudence or negligence in German warfare" turns out something quite different on closer investigation

To give all readers here an undisturbed impression of whether the revolutionary theses are correct, the first part of this book summarizes the decisive course of the war in the search for suspected effects of treason, sabotage and conspiracy

With this understanding, it is possible to comprehend the incredible breadth of betrayal revealed following parts It extended, as will be shown, not only to military and political operations

Even Germany's undisputed technical superiority in the development of new weapons suffered from betrayal until the last days of the war. From the development of the giant tanks to German nuclear tests in 1945 STALIN could thus almost look over the shoulders of German scientists

For years, researchers have been arguing about why Russia was able to achieve victory over the Third Reich, and still no agreement has reached. Something does not fit in every explanation! No wonder - because one was not ready to consider the meaning of the betrayal at the Eastern front for fear of the emergence of a new >dagger thrust legend< The reader may judge for himself!

"Betrayal never thrives. Why? Because when it does flourish, no one dares call it treason." (George HOWE, 1949)

Chapter 1

What has been kept from us until today What influence did betrayal have on the course of the war in the East 1943-1945? 1943: The chance of a draw in the East squandered

Stalingrad overestimated: the dire situation of both warring East at the beginning of 1943

The results between the North Cape and the Caucasus in late 1942 and early 1943 had not been particularly good for the Wehrmacht. In the spring of 1943, the German army on the Eastern Front was able to field just 2.7 million men, about 500,000 below plan strength.

In addition, the Germans had lost an entire year's worth of weapons and equipment in the twin disasters of Stalingrad and Africa.

Worse still, the two-front war was now having an increasingly threatening effect on warfare on the Eastern Front.

The failure of the Reich leadership to mobilize the German war economy entirely around the requirements of total war also made Germany's strategic position unnecessarily difficult.

>Modern< American authors then also note how close Germany came in 1942 to establishing effective control over the vast economic resources of the western and southern Soviet Union. This would have enabled the Third Reich not only to continue to dominate Europe but also to survive world war against an American-dominated alliance of nations.

In the process, the Germans let so many opportunities pass by and made so many wrong decisions which, if they had turned out differently, would still have changed the situation in Germany's favor. That this accumulation of mistakes was not just a coincidence, we have already shown in another work.

Thus, while Germany had squandered all chances the second year of the Eastern War, despite a hopeful right approach to establishing Reich's hegemony over the continent, the Soviets were equally unable to reap the fruits that STALIN envisioned.

In fact, the Soviet campaign around Stalingrad in November/December 1942 was only one of four major offensives that were to shatter the German Eastern Front. Instead of sweeping victories, all but the Battle of Stalingrad ended in brutal defeats.

In the end, the Red Army had suffered the catastrophic loss rate of 133 percent in 1942. Thus, the Wehrmacht had destroyed the Red Army, which had been rebuilt after the catastrophe of 1941, almost one and a half times within one year.

The brilliant German victory at Kharkov in March 1943 therefore set all alarm bells ringing in the Soviet High Command. We will discuss this below.

If on November 1, 1942 the Red Army still showed a front strength of 6124000 men, on April 3, 1943 STALIN could muster only 5792000 men. In February/March 1943 alone, 500000 Soviet soldiers had fallen.

Filled with despair, STALIN repeatedly turned to the Western Allies and complained that they were not doing enough to support the Soviet Union. Thus, on March 15, 1943 in a letter to British Prime Minister CHURCHILL, the Russian leader demanded immediate opening of a Second Front. France bring relief to the Red Army. There was not much left of the victory at Stalingrad!

the Germans were able to take advantage of onset of spring mud season to re-equip and regroup the Wehrmacht¹

HITLER planned to have Germany's Eastern Front armies go on the defensive in 1943. Before that, smaller offensive strikes were to buy the time necessary to consolidate German control over the raw materials of Ukraine. The first largest of these planned operations would later become famous as >Operation Citadel<

The forces freed up were to be used to secure "Fortress Europe" in the south.

Thus, the third German summer offensive was just around the corner. However, the marked cards that had already prevented Germany's possible victory in 1941 and 1942 were still in play. The Battle of Kharkov would show how much the Russian side had come to depend on them.

A) Wasted opportunity? The road to Kursk

Misinformation and unexpected help: Von Manstein's great victory at Kharkov and the Russian >Marne miracle<.

When the regularly recurring mud season paralyzed the Eastern Front for the time being at the end of March 1943, the German leadership had every reason to breathe a sigh of relief: after the debacle of Stalingrad, the front in

the East had been closed again to some extent and, moreover, had been shortened considerably. The draw (Unentschieden) was in the offing.

The shift of forces to the decisive left wing and VON MANSTEIN'S counteroffensive, as brilliantly planned as it was realized, had brought the Soviet avalanche, which had rolling four months earlier at Stalingrad halt in roughly the same line from which the Germans had started previous summer toward Caucasus and Volga.

When VON MANSTEIN had retaken Kharkov on March 15, 1943 and had advanced toward Belgorod on March 17, he joined the Second Army counterattack in the deep rear of the Russian Central Front. This way VON MANSTEIN not only destroyed the Third Panzer Army of the Voronezh Front, but also destroyed the Russian 69th Army and endangered the 40th^{1/2}

In the end, the German strategist had not only defeated the southwestern and Voronezh fronts, but also severely affected a third with the southern front and built up a deadly threat to the Russian central front.

Also, VON MANSTEIN'S counterattack played a decisive role in bringing Red Army's final attacks against 'Heeresgruppe Mitte' and 'Heeresgruppe Süd' to a halt.

In all, 52 Soviet divisions and brigades, including 25 armored brigades, disappeared from the Soviet headquarters situation map by the end of MANSTEIN'S counterattack.

The German counterattack had saved the Eastern Front from the most dangerous threat since July 1941. A >draw< on the Eastern Front was becoming increasingly likely.

In the process, STALIN and his high command were in the midst of a victory run before they met with doom between February 7 and 25, 1943.

THE RESULT WAS THAT VON MANSTEIN'S trap snapped shut when he made wrong decisions.

In fact, the ultimately disastrous instructions of Soviet Headquarters Stavka to the Southern Front of February 21, as well as the situation report of the >Southwest Front< of February 20, 1943, indicate to a large extent information from Soviet intelligence was believed to be reliable. This is a fact that emerges several times from Soviet memoir literature as well as the official *history of the Great Patriotic War*.

This is where the mysterious spy ring from the Führer's headquarters comes into play. STALIN'S direct line from the Fuehrer can be proven indirectly using secret information the Swiss General Staff, which came from the Hausmann office. It was certainly passed on to Moscow by the Soviet spy RÖSSLER.

For example, it was reported in Switzerland on February 11 that German troops in the Donets region were in retreat. Only strong rearguards would

remain standing and be sacrificed if necessary. According to the same Swiss report, "Thus the new catastrophe takes its course for the Germans. The losses to be expected German side will far exceed those of Stalingrad. Removal of supplies by rail via Gorlovka and via Stalino has been impossible since February 12; the rail lines and stations are congested and in chaotic condition."

On February 17, 1943, Swiss Report 291, which probably also reached Moscow, stated: "The purpose of the German resistance now, after the Russian breakthrough at and west of Krasnoarmeyskoye [meaning the breakthrough of Panzer Group POPOV], is limited to securing the German retreat from the Donets Basin, first to the line Njebognie-Asov-sches Knie; in the second jump to the line Dnjepr-Knie-Berbjenz; in the third jump to the lower Dnjepr."

And on February 21, 1943, Report Number 307 stated: "The consequences of the fall of Kharkov and the collapse of German improvised Donets front are judged by the OKW to be catastrophic. In danger of being cut off, crushed, a hopeless defensive struggle, worn down in fruitless counterattacks, or overtaken and annihilated by the onrushing Russian masses

to become, stand since 17 February the formations and remnants of more than 40 German divisions. To these belonged almost half of all German armored troops and tanks, which remained to the German army and weapons- β at all."

These messages coincided completely with the instructions that STALIN - had then sent to his doubting supreme commanders (they had detected German deployment efforts to counterattack) and to his army groups

is fascinating why the spy ring had delivered such misleading news. He, who otherwise could always report so well from the >Wolf-schanze< and from the >Mauerwald< as well as from the Reich Chancellery?

The writer Paul CARELL was able to establish clear facts on this point as early as 1966: During the spring battle between Donets and Dnieper, German tactical and also operational decisions were largely made in VON MANSTEIN'S command post in Russia, and not at the Führer's headquarters, where the spy ring's wires ended. HITLER WAS also not at the Fuehrer's headquarters in East Prussia during the decisive days, but with a small staff in Vinnitsa. While he consulted with VON MANSTEIN there, the main personnel of the German High Command and the Fuehrer's headquarters had stayed behind in East Prussia - probably also the spy ring and its informants! All the traitors had at their disposal were the pessimistic interpretations of the situation indulged in by the senior staff officers in East Prussia, far from the battlefield at Kharkov and far from the Führer.

The information from the spy ring fatally confirmed for the Red Army STALIN'S ideas and wishful thinking about the state of the Wehrmacht and he acted accordingly. One can see from this, according to CARELL, how close the glory and misery of betrayal were! Only a few weeks later, the spies made up for their mistakes.¹

Here we have also somewhat anticipated events, but in March 1943 the Germans laid the foundation for the doom of >Operation Citadel< in July 1943.

In fact, VON MANSTEIN had already proposed in the first days of March to launch a pincer attack from the south and north against the Kursk >bulge<, where half a dozen Soviet armies were located. The conditions for such an annihilation strike seemed particularly favorable after the situation had also

on the southern wing of >Heeresgruppe Mitte< had been settled in favor of the Germans.

If the Germans now took advantage of this situation and pushed further north from Kharkov, the consequences could not be foreseen. Then not only Bjelgorad would have been lost and Kursk hardly defensible, but also the rear of the Russian "Army Group Central Front", which had been advanced far to the west, would have been exposed. Their five armies would have hung in the air, and in a pincer attack from Kursk and Orel they would have perished in their position at that time.

The Russian situation was so desperate that STALIN himself ordered the former Stalingrad fighters lying near Stalingrad to be refreshed to the west in order to save the bad situation. Furthermore, everything possible was withdrawn from the High North near Murmansk and an enormous risk taken there.

STALIN urgently knocked on door of his Western allies for the opening of the long-promised "Second Front", for which these

but - even if they had wanted to - were not able to

However, when VON MANSTEIN tried to persuade VON KLUGE TO LAUNCH an attack on March 14, the latter categorically refused declaring armies of his "Army Group Center" "in need of rest" after the preceding battles. The probably sure >destructive strike< was omitted. One of several questionable

been. VON KLUGE was the only Army Group commander who had been converted to military resistance and conspiracy¹

In the Far North, too, MANSTEIN'S victory at Kharkov⁴ opened up a - prospect of victory for Germany. What had failed for lack of forces in the Tundra in the summer of 1941 now seemed possible. General DIETL'S Lapland Army only had to start!

Bear Feeding - Why Murmansk was not conquered by General Dietl 1943

One of the great failures of the German Eastern Army was never to have captured the Arctic Sea port of Murmansk on the Kola Peninsula

On September 22, 1941, the German Lapland Army had to abandon its repeated attempt to cross the Liza River. From then on, the front in the far north remained relatively stable and immobile until the summer of 1944.

This meant that the port of Murmansk remained an important hub for Western Allied aid deliveries to the Soviets. In fact, a quarter of all so-called >lend-lease goods* passed through Murmansk. Although the majority of the supplies went to the Soviets via the Pacific route, for reasons of neutrality (there was a non-aggression pact between Russia and Japan) they were only civilian goods.

Thus, Russia received almost all of the 22,800 armored vehicles, 321,700 trucks, and 78,000 jeeps and 20,000 aircraft delivered during the war Arctic Ocean route under the lease and loan agreement.

Even though fierce air and sea battles developed for years over the material supplies running eastward via convoys, the Allies, after all, decisively supported the Russian war machine with the cargo that had come through.

This had a particular effect in the years after Stalingrad, when the Soviets could rely primarily on the motorization supplied by the allies. Their effect was so significant that, according to >modern< researchers, the Red Army's advance through Eastern Europe would hardly have been possible without U.S., British, or Canadian materiel¹

The >Bärenfü- tung< was also important for direct Soviet warfare. Thus, of the Red Army tanks shot down at Kursk in July 1943, 20 percent came from United States. In addition, huge numbers of destroyed Churchill, Stuart and Valentine tanks remained on the battlefields during Operation Citadel.

Also in the battles in Hungary in 1944/45, later Lend-Lease->Sherman< tanks on soaps of the Russians played the role of an important stopgap

After the German Luftwaffe had never succeeded ineffectively disrupting railroad lines from Murmansk to the Russian hinterland despite fierce attacks with Stukas, destroyers and horizontal bombers only a ground offensive could have tied off the "feeding of the bear" so dangerous for the Third Reich - all the more so since 190000 German troops were tied upon the Arctic front in the far north which would have been urgently needed elsewhere on the Eastern

This chance to clear up the situation would have existed in 1943! that time the Red Army had of necessity withdrawn all somehow expendable forces from the far north, since in the area Kharkov-Kursk-Orel as well as in the south of the eastern front the decision of the total campaign was approaching^{1,3}

This had not gone unnoticed by the German Lapland Army. Carefully collected results of reconnaissance and shock troops as well as long-range reconnaissance from the air had clearly shown, that the Soviets had withdrawn stronger forces here. These were in no way indications of a new Russian attack attempt stubbornly claimed by essential parts of the Wehrmacht command staff.

These alleged intentions to attack had been cleverly spread by false reports from Russian broadcasters to prevent the withdrawal of German troops from the far north and their delivery to the hot spots of the war in the east

Again, the question arises whether the German High Command deceived here because they wanted to be deceived

In circles of his officers, General DIETL COMMENTED on these false fears of German headquarters thus: "An attack on Scandinavia is in no case to be expected."

Admiral CANARIS's defenses were no help to the Wehrmacht's defense either.¹

According to Finnish information German defensive officers in Finland under Frigate Captain Alexander CELLARIUS delivered only devastating performances apart from arrogance and fell completely for the Soviet misinformation in their assessment of the enemy situation. Because they wanted to fall in against better knowledge?

In fact, Finland had 350000 Mann under arms at that time in the summer of 1943, and the 20th German Mountain Army under Colonel General DIETL had about another 190000 men.

Thus, in the summer of 1943, the distribution of forces in this area was 2:1 in favor of the German-Finnish troops. These were in best condition

and were ready for a last big general attack. Their attack would probably have led with some certainty to the capture of the large Russian Arctic Sea ports and thus to the cutting off of STALIN from his vital Western Allied lend-lease supplies.

At that time, the Russians could not have withdrawn any troops from the southern and central parts of the Eastern Front, so this offensive was infinitely more promising than the first German-Finnish attempt of summer 1941, which went badly.

The real reasons why this attack did not happen are interesting.

As early as March 1943, the possibility of a German-Finnish offensive was discussed with the Finnish Field Marshal MÄNNERHEIM, however, did not want to line up his troops for an attack. At the same time, Finnish opposition circles were da-
to start negotiations with the Russians about a peace treaty, which one did not want to endanger with it.

While the Finns refused to take part in this offensive, the German top leadership failed to take up this armament alone, even though such a solo action also promised victory.

Well-informed experts such as Lieutenant General Andreas NIELSEN, - Chief of Staff of Air Fleet 5 in the North Area, were then also convinced that such an attack on the Arctic ports could be carried out successfully.

However, full of fear of an allegedly existing Russian superiority, the OKW (High Command of the Wehrmacht) Thus, 1943 turned out to be the year of wantonly lost chances of the war in the far north at the Arctic front.

General DIETL's suggestion that, in view of the abandonment of a German offensive of his own, at least the surplus German troops of the Lapland Army withdrawn, the really endangered sections of the Eastern Front was just as categorically rejected.

In complete misjudgment of the facts, the Chief of the Wehrmacht Joint Staff, Alfred JODL, STATED: "Withdrawal of forces from Finland is out of the question, since in the event of a major enemy attack, Mountain AOK 20 is entirely dependent on its own small reserves . . ."

Only in the event of a fall from Finland should withdrawal plans from Lapland be prepared.

Thus, despite the lack of a Russian threat, 190,000 fully combat-capable and motivated soldiers of the 20th German Mountain Army continued to stand guard uselessly in the far north while the Western Allies' deliveries of materiel continued.

It was not until 1944 that the Soviets began to decisively reinforce their forces in the far north in order to really attack the German armies.

However, this took place only in connection with Finland's withdrawal from the war. Also, the real Russian deployment was closely observed by DIETL'S soldiers months before that they could successfully prepare for their timely retreat

For the senseless holding of the German Lapland Army in the first half of 1944 as a force as united and unweakened as possible on a secondary theater of war, there also comes a purely internal political motive is in question. This could have to do with plans for a coup.

What is meant here is a repetition of a situation similar to that in the Spanish Civil War in 1936, when the putschists succeeded in turning their hopeless situation against the government in Madrid after the highly motivated Moroccan army under General FRANCO transported to the mainland as reinforcements. Was something similar to take place with DIETL'S force? There is evidence the commander of the Lapland Army, General DIETL was actually contacted later by the military resistance in this regard

B) Kursk - The Battle of Fate Betrayed

A German surprise could have meant the end of the Red Army or: Why was the betrayal of Kursk for the Russians so important?

In 1941, the Wehrmacht had launched a general offensive from Finland to the Black Sea. A year later, it was only enough for an attack in the southern part.

In the spring of 1943, the Soviet generals faced a difficult problem. Twice before, during the summer battles of 1941 and 1942, they had miscalculated the focus and direction of the German attack. The consequences were existentially dangerous for Russia. They were not allowed to deceive themselves once again. Behind it lay the brutal truth that the second year of the war had by no means cost the Soviet Union fewer lives than the critical first ten months after the beginning of Barbarossa's enterprise

From the available intelligence and treason information, it was clear to STALIN'S command team that the German Wehrmacht longed for a large-scale general offensive in the spring of 1943. A summer battle like in the previous years was nevertheless to be expected.

situation became even more dangerous, because 1943 tanks of the Red

Army were the first time technically clearly inferior to the German tanks >PZ IV lang<, >Tiger<, >Panther< and >Ferdinand<. It was to be feared STALIN'S armored shock troops un-

Under unfavorable circumstances, even after Stalingrad, the threat of annihilation loomed again, as it did in 1941.

The Soviet forces therefore needed two pieces of information above all: Where and when would the Germans strike? Remedy was in sight!

"We know"

On July 1, 1943, HITLER received all the army commanders of the Eastern Front as well as the commanding generals involved in 'Unternehmen Zitadelle' his teahouse at Oberberghof and told them: "I have decided to set the attack date for >Zitadelle< for July 5."

Already in the last hours of that day, Soviet intelligence received the unmistakable message that the Germans would now come at Kursk. The 'Administration Reconnaissance' informed the General Staff of the Red Army on the night of July 2 that it was certain that the enemy would move to the attack in the next few days, or on July 6 at the latest.¹⁻²

On the same July 2, 1943, Lieutenant General Nikita KHRUSHCHEV, the future state and party leader of the Soviet Union, commanders of the Voronezh Front, a log cabin near the village of Sorinskoye Dvory, not far from Kursk and announced: "The fascists will attack between July 3 and July 5. This is not a guess. We know it."

In fact, on July 5, 1943, the great operation "Unternehmen Zitadelle" ordered by HITLER in the strictest secrecy. The question arises how the Soviets got to know Germany's deployment up to the exact date of the attack and whether the Germans did not even know that their secret plan had long been known to STALIN.

Who was the first to reveal 'Operation Citadel'?

It was not the Russian spy stations of the 'Red Three' in Switzerland or ULTRA that gave the Soviet High Command the first indication of the planned German attack.

On March 13, 1943, HITLER had signed his "Operations Order Number 5," ten days before the end of German counteroffensive at Kharkov. In it, HITLER had given the formula-

len conclusion announced to launch in the future a limited offensive operation by the Army Groups >Center< and >South< to destroy the Kursk front bulge. The attack was given the name >Operation Citadel*.

But even before HITLER issued the supplemented "Operation Order Number 6" for it on April 15, 1943, Moscow knew his intentions.

The Soviet High Command received this initial information, as stated, not from the >Red Three* or ULTRA, but from the Chief of Staff of the 101st Slovak Regiment, Jan NALEPKA. His Slovak regiment had deployed since 1942 in the German front southwest Minsk in front of the railroad junctions to secure the communication routes. NALEPKA had sought contact with Soviet partisans and got it to the partisan unit "Saburov" which operated in the southwestern area between Belarus and Ukraine. The chief of staff had a Soviet liaison named LABREW.

Alexander N. SABUROV later reported the details of the betrayal: "LABREV brought information from NALEPKA, which forced our staff to work hard all night. He had given us details of the enemy's new offensive the Soviet-German front. It bore the code name "Citadel". SABUROV had NALEPKA'S materials radioed to Moscow on the night of March 29, 1943. These had been mainly documents from the staff of "Army Group Center", which VON KLUGE commanded. Among these papers were not only an assessment of the situation in the rear of the "Army Group Center" but also an instruction on measures to be taken in connection with the planned summer offensive "Operation Citadel".

importance of this information to the Soviet High Command evident from the fact that Russian headquarters immediately responded with a radio message instructing SABUROV to propose the source who had given this news about "Operation Citadel" for a state award

Jan NALEPKA, who died in 1943, became - as the only Slovak - posthumously "Hero of the Soviet Union". In 2004, the Slovak president promoted him to brigadier general, also posthumously.

should be interesting to know how and through whom the information from the staff of the "Army Group Center" came to the Chief of Staff of the 101st Slovak Regiment so promptly

Instead of secrecy: the most thorough preparation ever?

On April 15, 1943, HITLER emphasized his Operations Order Number 6 for Unternehmen Zitadellen "I have decided, as soon as the weather permits conduct the attack >Zitadelle< as the first of this year's attack strikes. This attack is therefore of decisive importance. Therefore, all preparations to be carried out with the greatest care and vigor. Best formations, the best weapons, the best leaders, large quantities of ammunition are to be placed at focal points

The victory at Kursk must act as a beacon for the world. is important to preserve the element of surprise as much as possible and, above all, to keep the enemy in the dark about the timing of the attack. For secrecy only

the absolutely necessary personalities are to be instructed in the intentionany case, it must be achieved that nothingof the intentions is betrayedagain through carelessnessand negligence."

When HITLER gave this order, Moscow already knew his plans!

The Red Army was about to fight the biggest and best prepared battle in its historyat Kursk

Red Army's defensive space there was prepared to a depth and with a thoroughness that Soviетроops had not been able to achieve before

Generals VATUTIN and ROKOSSOVSKY squeezed seven armies into the Kursk bulge.The defense inside the frontal arcwas staggered into six lines, two more were placed in front of the reserve armies About 4800 km of trenches were cut at a depth of 300 km. Tens of thousands of kilometers of barbed wire

laid, armored obstacles built. Thousands of cannon and mortar positions represented the highest artillery concentrations the world had seen up to that time. Perhaps most consequential, General ZHUKOV had about a million land mines laid. Furthermore, rivers had been dammed to trap German tanks in masses of water by opening the dams, and 150 field airfields had been established.

When all the preparatory work was completed, 1336 000 men, 3444 tanks, 2900 airplanes and 19000 artillery pieces were waiting for the German attackers.

An officer of the >Tiger Division 503< later wrote: "The Soviets had set up a defense system, whose depth extension was unimaginable for us." Surprise looks different!

Although the Red Army had never been able to prepare so thoroughly for an operation before or since, it made an almost fatal mistake. Thus, in the distribution of German forces, the center of gravity of the German attack expected to be in the north of the Kursk front section at >Heeresgruppe Mitte < and the defensive measures concentrated accordingly. VON KLUGE's divisions thus encountered fire lanes that were >due* to be established precisely at their directions. The minefields in the north had a depth of more than 60 kilometers^{1,2}

In fact, however, the Wehrmacht troops in the south of the Kursk bulge were far more dangerous and stronger. Colonel General Hermann HOTH's 4th Panzer Army later managed to break through the defense system there by a hair's breadth.

Had the Russian leadership relied on false information?^{1,2}

Too much information can hurt: German deceptive and confusion among the Russian leadership

Even before HITLER ISSUED his Operations Order Number 6 ^Unternehmen Zitadelle* on April 15, 1943 as the first of several-

Russian General ZHUKOV HAD already ordered the planned attack on April 12, 1943, named Kursk as the most probable target of the German summer offensive. Corresponding defense plans had been commissioned¹

An incredible array of treason sources and Western Allied radio reconnaissance (ULTRA) contributed to the Russians' faster and better knowledge of German plans at Kursk than most front-line Wehrmacht commanders

main source for this decisive information was besides the English radio reconnaissance >ULTRA<, the betrayal from Switzerland. The so-called >Red Three< had forwarded from there in April 1943 the most essential contents

of the deployment plans of the Germans, as they had been announced in Rastenburg and Berchtesgaden to the leadership in Moscow. Even the initial version of the Wehrmacht command staff was immediately sent to Moscow. ZHUKOV's alleged instinct is thus clarified.

However, STALIN's planners then fell victim to overinformation about German intentions: Disagreements in the German leadership had caused the attack on Kursk to be postponed several times.

Thus, already on April 20, 1943, information came from the network of the >Red Three< that the date of the attack on Kursk, originally planned for the first week of May, had been postponed. Fourteen days later, the agents from Switzerland reported as the latest news from the Fuehrer's headquarters that the start of the German offensive was to take place on June 12, 1943. Again for nothing!

The never-ending postponements of the German attack had caused great confusion on the Russian side. Soldiers of the Red Army were always put on alert, each time nothing happened.

STALIN eventually attributed these repeated delays of the attack to dark motives and increasingly expressed doubts about the true German intentions. By the end of June 1943, however, even STALIN was then convinced that HITLER would have the attack at Kursk. The treason information was simply too accurate!

German air and radio reconnaissance had soon discovered that the Russians in the planned attack sector near Kursk were preparing on a large scale for the >secret< German large-scale attack. More and more responsible persons realized that the enemy was waiting for the Wehrmacht!

If one still wanted to maintain a chance of success, one saw the only chance in keeping the Russians dark as long as possible: one's own intentions and especially about the planned date of the attack.

For example, the commander of the 9th Army, General MODEL, had tank maneuvers in Germany recorded on tape and then played the tapes with powerful loudspeakers near the Soviet lines in wooded areas. The goal was to give the Red Army the wrong impression about the real whereabouts of German tank troops.¹

Luftwaffe units were also held back until the last moment in other sectors of the Eastern Front. Thus, the 1st Division of >Air Force Command< East (Air Fleet 6) in the north and the 8th Air Corps of Air Fleet 4 in the south were not to move to their new operational airfields around Kursk as main reinforcements until the eve of the attack.^{2,3}

The most important thing for the Russian planners was the exact date of the German attack. What had they not already been told from hitherto reliable sources: May 3, May 16 and 26, and June 12, all dates on which the

attack was in fact planned.

The Germans now saw their chance and tried to mislead the Soviets at least by disinformation that >Zitadelle< had been postponed. These false reports ran to Moscow via the English >ULTRA< radio decrypts as well as via the so-called >Rote Kapelle< in Switzerland.

On June 27, 1943, the Soviet espionage centers in Switzerland even fell for more impudent false reports spread orders of Colonel General Alfred JODL. According to these, the German measures in the Kursk area would now no longer serve to attack, but only to prepare a counteroffensive for the Soviet attacks expected from the Kursk arc.

As a climax of the German disinformation attempts, General VON MANSTEIN, the commander-in-chief of >Heeresgruppe Süd<, was even expected to visit Bucharest for several days on July 1, 1943.

The landing of MANSTEIN in Bucharest was then also immediately reported by agents in the capital to the Soviet High Command in Moscow.⁴

After landing, however, VON MANSTEIN was to fly on immediately to Rastenburg to reappear in Romania after the conference from East Prussia had been completed. On the outside, everything seemed to be working.

However, the elaborate deception plan, just like the previous disinformation attempts, was futile in the end, as the Soviets were informed of HITLER'S decision to attack at East Prussian headquarters that very night.

What did the German intelligence chiefs Admiral Canaris and General Gehlen do with the postponement of the attack date for >Operation Citadel<?

Even today, military experts overwhelmingly agree that if the great battle of Kursk had begun earlier, it would have meant a quick success for Germany's Wehrmacht.

Colonel General Walter MODEL, then commander of the 9th Army, is considered to be one of the main persons responsible for the first postponement of an earliest possible attack date against Kursk. Under VON KLUGE, he had presented HITLER with a very pessimistic report on the state of the Russian defenses in the Kursk arc on May 3, 1943¹².

To this end, MODEL had presented HITLER with aerial photographs of the steadily strengthening Soviet defenses at Kursk and demanded that the offensive be abandoned or at least delayed until sufficient German reinforcements arrived. Since MODEL had a reputation as a particularly energetic, battle-hardened senior troop leader who was less critical of the German leadership than many other senior officers, HITLER was impressed by MODEL'S warnings and demanded the opinion of the other meeting participants. Their opinion, however, boiled down to the fact that any

postponement of the attack date must increase the risk that the enemy reinforcement expected with certainty would shift the balance of forces even further to the disadvantage of the attacker, who had long been outnumbered anyway. The meeting ended without a decision.

It was not until 11 May 1943 that army commanders-in-chief who had returned to their headquarters, received orders that "Operation Citadel" would have to be postponed until mid-June.

Model was thus partly responsible for the two-month postponement of Operation Citadel. However, he did not only proceed from available aerial photographs, but fell victim to a critical misinterpretation of the enemy's balance of power at Kursk. According to a report he had received from Abteilung Fremde Heere Ost (Gehlen/Von der Roenne), the Soviet central front had amassed 1500 tanks at Kursk. In fact, however, there were only about 1000 red combat vehicles. If Model had understood that the Soviet tank superiority was only 200 vehicles, he would probably have been ready for immediate surcharging.¹⁻²

The German wait made it increase the number of armored vehicles of the 9th Army by 25 percent at the beginning of July while the Soviets were able to almost double their number in the meantime. In the field of artillery, the Germans were able to strengthen their artillery by just 362 new guns during the period in question, while the Russians were able to add 1500 guns to Kursk's defense at the same time.

Later, Foreign Armies East then underestimated the Russian strength when it came to the fact that Citadel should not be cancelled completely. FHO immediately overlooked in the depth of the Russian space the whole Steppe Front army grouping of the Soviets.

In addition to misleading intelligence by Foreign Armies East, Admiral Canaris' defenses also contributed to helping the Soviets at Kursk.

Due to erroneous reports by Admiral Canaris, Hitler was forced to move infantry forces to Sardinia, the Peloponnese and Crete as well, in order to be able to counter Allied invasion feared by the Abwehr.

Thus, not only did the German assault force lose valuable time before Kursk but the additional infantry divisions would have been urgently needed for the first and most difficult part of the attack, namely the breakthrough phase through the sophisticated position system. They waited idly, rifle at foot, in the Mediterranean area for the enemy landings predicted by Canaris.

Hitler was unsure for months whether he should let the attack on Kursk go ahead at all. He was not convinced by either the opponents or the

supporters.¹

Only on June 18, according to the war diary of the OKW, he finally spoke out infavor of the implementation of >Zitadelle<

Two circumstances contributed to this: Field Marshal VON KLUGE had explained to him that the photographs brought by the Luftwaffe alleged 20 kilometer deep enemy position system were exaggerated. These aerial photographs also contained all the ruined trenches from earlier combat operations. HITLER SUBSEQUENTLY stated that the results of the enemy reconnaissance on Kursk were "pure exaggerations"

The second reason was that HITLER now believed that Italy would continue the war on Germany's side.¹ His doubts about Italy's war-weariness had until then been partly responsible for the fact that >Zitadelle< had been repeatedly postponed. HITLER was successfully lied to here by Admiral CANARIS.

CANARIS had been aware of the uncertainty spreading through the Italian officer corps since the fall of 1941. Demonstrably based on his information, the admiral was convinced in 1943 that Italy would soon withdraw from the war. Assuming that Italy's withdrawal from the Axis would have "unforeseeable (!) consequences of a military and political nature," CANARIS misled the Wehrmacht leadership and the Führer himself.²

Deceived and misled, HITLER set the opening of >Operation Citadel< for July 5 on June 25 1943. At the opening of command on July 1, the Fuehrer then informed the enlisted high commanders that >Operation Citadel< could finally because the critical situation in the Mediterranean had now been overcome. At the same time the >Western Allies< loaded their transport ships for the invasion of Sicily!

Although the Führer had already remarked at the conclusion of a conference on May 4, 1943, "It must not go wrong," - incomprehension prevailed among specialists uninformed of the exact background, such as General der Panzertruppe VON KNOBELSDORFF: "It was disconcerting to contemplate that. ... notwithstanding the bitter experiences of the past year the Army General Staff was bunglingly engage in a dangerous gamble in which our last reserves would be put at risk."

Did the Luftwaffe discover the trap at Kursk?

As early as April 1943, German Luftwaffe reconnaissance aircraft were able to bring in increasingly concrete evidence that the Russians were expecting a German attack in the Kursk sector.

Among these disturbing images were aerial photographs brought in by German airmen on May 6, 1943. They showed Soviet tanks dug in at many

points in the Kursk arc Air reconnaissance by Air Fleet 6 at the same time discovered heavy Russian troop concentrations in the Yelets-Kastornoye-, Kursk area. More and more air forces were located on both flanks of the Kursk sector.^{1,2} Through the radio listening service, the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 15th and 16th Russian air armies were detected. In his book *Der Flug zum Don* (*The Flight to the Don*), the long-range reconnaissance officer Georg PEMLER reported on the incredibly accurate level of knowledge of German air reconnaissance July 3, 1943: "What made me far more thoughtful, however, was the reference to the regroupings and concentrations of Soviet army units detected in the last few days more I thought about this assumption more the suspicion rose in me that the leadership of the Red Army knew our intentions and plans. It was now the third time that I was confronted with such grave suspicions course of this war

Also during the flight in the morning I had noticed the strong concentration of enemy formations in front of the 4th Panzer Army and here especially in front of the II SS Panzer Corps. In the front arc around Bjelgorod the positions had a depth of almost 50 km. Trench system followed trench system, cleverly camouflaged and only recognizable after thorough aerial photo evaluation I could not help feeling that the Soviets were forming a 'hollow alley' in the direction of Obojan. Was there treachery involved here? The suspicion did not seem so unfounded to me."¹

Naturally, the findings of the air reconnaissance were collected and discussed with the Army staff officers. Not only the reports of the long-range reconnaissance units were compared, but also those of the close reconnaissance groups NAG 15, NAG 10, NAG 4, and NAG 6. Again it was clear that the enemy knew very well about all the intentions and plans of the Germans. PEMLER wondered, "Why the massings in front of the three Panzer Corps? Why the deeply echeloned Pak barrages? Why the clearing of the foremost field positions? they perhaps even know a relief attack is planned for tomorrow afternoon? The strong operational armored reserves in the depth of space. The massing of more than four air armies. We are going to see our blue miracle." Because of these alarming reports the participants of the meeting did not want to hesitate a minute and immediately inform both Army Groups Central and South as well as the Fuehrer's headquarters

However, their reports were not exploited by the responsible army corps. An army officer, staff captain of the 52nd Army Corps shortly before the offensive delivered to the scouts the latest key documents and message boards that were to be used on the first day of "Operation Citadel", communicated the unbelievable: "You may be right, but until proven otherwise, we have to proceed from the known facts." As the only known

reaction, in the plans of "HeeresgruppeMitte" the deadline for the breakthrough, which had been set for two days, increased to six days

According to PEMLER, the air reconnaissance officers were - unanimous. They thought the planned attack was madness: "The expected losses are out of all proportion to the success. If we look at the last aerial photographs of the deeply built position systems, this is what it must have looked like in the First World War before Verdun.

have. It is a complete mystery to me why our leadership is so committed to the Kursk arc. . . One picks the weakest point (!) But here confronted with far superior forces. This planning contradicts all previous leadership decisions."

was clear to all that the Russians knew more coming German offensive than the little occasional prisoner testimony, radio and telephone surveillance, and agents in the area near the front. PEMLER concluded by mentioning the angry words of his comrade, Luftwaffe Lieutenant GERTH, in response to this mousetrap into which Germany's tank reserves were threatening to fall: "It must not be true. It must not. Do you understand me? Then it was all for nothing again!"

What were the consequences of Soviet foreknowledge?

No discussion of "Operation Citadel" can ignore the important role that arose from Soviet foreknowledge of German plans¹

The widespread belief that the Germans attacked at Kursk in the same way their forefathers did at Verdun in World War I by frontal assaults must be clearly rejected. The Germans wanted to launch a surprise attack, it was to be achieved by using infiltration tactics

The Soviet defense system before Kursk, however, had been masterfully developed. It was made possible because the Soviets knew exactly what the Germans were up to, right down to the exact time of attack². Knowing the attack zones in advance, they could arrange the defensive belts accordingly. The Russians believed that 15 pieces of 7.26 cm anti-tank guns would now be sufficient per kilometer to stop an attack by 50 Panzer IVs; 30 would be needed according to Russian calculations at the time, to stop the attack by an equal number of "Tigers". However, this theory was to be disproved by practice.

It must be mentioned here that, in spite of everything, the first attack objectives of the Wehrmacht at Kursk were all achieved, even if not on the first day, as it was planned in many cases.

These delays in quickly reaching the initial objectives were a consequence of the extremely developed Soviet defense system. It was precisely the time

factor that was then to decide on premature termination of the operation. During the surprisingly fast German retreat, a lot of valuable material was then lost.

In the nine days of >Operation Citadel< the Russians lost 80,000 dead and 175,000 wounded on the Central Front alone. On the Voronezh Front and the Steppe Front there are no exact figures. Proportionally, this was more than during the Battle of Stalingrad. By July 12, 1943, the Germans managed to destroy at least 1,640 Soviet tanks and 1,400 artillery pieces.

German losses during "Operation Citadel" were surprisingly low. For example, from July 5 to 31, 1943, the Wehrmacht lost only 18 Tiger tanks at Kursk, and the entire "Army Group South" forfeited no more than 150 tanks and 30 assault guns. Many of them could be repaired later. The "Heeresgruppe Süd" reported 3,330 dead and 20,720 wounded.¹ The "Heeresgruppe Mitte" lost 73 tanks. The personnel losses here amounted to 4,500 dead and 17,500 wounded.

The Soviets demonstrably knew almost all details about "Operation Citadel" in advance. This makes the high losses suffered by the Red Army during these battles seem even more astonishing. One can only speculate how high they would have been if Stalin and his high command had not had their advance information. What would it have looked like if the Soviets had fallen for misinformation and withdrawn their troops from Kursk? This was exactly the situation that the German "Heeresgruppe Mitte" faced about a year later and as a result of which it perished.

Despite >ULTRA< - the two failed >decapitation strikes< against the German air force

Agent John CAIRNCROSS, despite severe nervous discomfort, had managed to provide his Soviet principals with the most accurate details of the Luftwaffe on the Eastern Front. The Soviet leadership consequently decided to exploit these >ULTRA< results. After all, in the spring of 1943, more than 70 percent of the Luftwaffe's front-line strength in the east was concentrated at airfields between Orel and Kharkov.

With targeted massive air strikes against German airfields, six Russian air armies therefore wanted to destroy large parts of the Luftwaffe on the ground even before the Battle of Kursk began. This could have been decisive.

The Soviet annihilation strike was to be similar to its German model of June 21, 1941. The operation under

The project, headed by Air Marshal NOVIKOV, prepared in the strictest secrecy and was known only to a limited circle of people. Any written, telegraphic or telephone reports about this enterprise were forbidden.¹⁻²

The first strike, on April 22, 1943, hit the German airfield at Orscha, where the German long-range reconnaissance planes so dangerous to Russia were located, and was a complete success. The planes of the 1st, 4th, and 121st Long-Range Reconnaissance Squadrons were destroyed on the ground, as were those of the 100th Long-Range Reconnaissance Group. As the only available long-range reconnaissance in the east at Kursk now remained the 4th long-range reconnaissance group.¹⁴

However, the Germans were quickly made up for losses of aircraft supplies from the Reich so that the long-range reconnaissance planes >Luftwaffenkommando Ost< later nevertheless played a considerable part in the German successes at the Battle of Kursk.

Orscha, however, was only a prelude to the main strike. In the early morning hours of May 6, 1943, Soviet bombers attacked 17 German airfields of Air Fleets 4 and 6 from Smolensk to the Sea of Azov over a frontal width of 1200 km. A total of 404 Soviet bombers surprised the Luftwaffe, but were only able to destroy 22 German aircraft on the ground. When they attacked again at about 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. the same day, the Germans shot down 21 Soviet planes.

Over the next two days, 346 more Soviet attacks were flown against German airfields. However, they ran into well-prepared German fighter defenses and cost the Russians 101 aircraft shot down.

After only three days, Soviet headquarters had to order Stavka to end the operations.

This series of attacks, triggered by >ULTRA<, is still referred to as the

largest operation of the Red Air Force in World War II. In three days, some 1400 sorties were flown and, according to Soviet figures, more than 500 German aircraft were destroyed. In fact, between May 6 and 8, the Germans lost only 23 of their own aircraft to Russian airfield attacks.

Soviet intelligence was also behind these attacks, predicting German offensive at Kursk between May 10 and 12. HITLER had moved the date back, as explained above.

When then on July 5, 1943 "Operation Citadel" really began, the 8th German Fliegerkorps received a warning from radio reconnaissance in the middle of its own launch preparations that the Soviet air force was already in the air ahead of the Germans. German radar installations of the "Freya" type set up near Kharkov since the spring of 1943 then confirmed that the Soviet attack units were indeed already approaching the five crowded German airfields near Kharkov. The Soviets long known about the German "Freya" radar stations, and some of the Red planes attempted to evade German radar detection by low-level flights below 400 meters. However, this thwarted by less careful pilots who approached in squadrons at altitudes above 1200 meters, fully within the detection range of the German radar.

In a now famous maneuver, the Germans now their fighters first instead of bombers. They intercepted the Soviets before they reached the airfields and were able to shoot down 120 Soviet planes with minimal losses of their own.

Other German planes had already taken off early in silence the Russian artillery, which hours before "Operation Citadel" had begun, and they now met the approaching Red Air Force planes with fire.

All Russian attempts to gain air superiority over the battlefield by accurate "ULTRA" information from the very beginning had pretty much failed. However, it must have been suddenly clear to those involved on the German side that the Soviets knew exactly in advance about the timing of the German offensive.

Luftwaffe General Hans SEIDEMANN, commander of the 8th Air Corps, reported in a postwar study for the U.S. Army that the Germans had also intended to knock out Russian airfields at the start of the offensive. General

However, DESSLOCH had forbidden to conduct the usual air strikes against the Soviet airfields. His planes were to appear over the battlefield only when the attack of the ground troops had begun, and not earlier. The reason for General DESSLOCH'S decision was to allow the Luftwaffe to achieve a tactical surprise of the enemy.

The question is who surprised whom here! If the Soviet air force had not suffered such heavy losses by its failed preemptive strike, the German attack forces at Kursk would have been exposed to massive Russian air attacks unhindered from the very beginning

Later, too, German Luftwaffe operational command at Kursk made some strange blunders.

The >Beinahesieg<. Was an agent's error responsible for threatened breakthrough at the south wing on Kursk?

For decades, postwar Soviet historiography, as well as its many Western adherents, had great difficulty explaining what happened in the southern part of the Battle of Kursk.¹⁻²

here is the realization of HITLER'S Operation Order Number 6 by Panzer General HOTH, as claimed by these experts for on April 15, 1943, HITLER and his Chief of Staff, General ZEITZLER, HAD agreed that HOTH'S 4th Panzer Army with its two panzer corps should advance northward in a straight line to secure the river crossings over the Psel south of Obojan.

In fact, however, the famous tank battle of Prokhorovka took place elsewhere on July 12, 1943, where two steel Armadas collided in a very confined space. According to decades of Allied historiography the titanic crash destroyed some 400 German tanks and thus decided the Battle of Kursk

In fact, however, the German combat vehicles had succeeded in destroying some 1000 of General ROTMISTROW'S Soviet tanks despite fivefold enemy superiority. General HAUSSE'S II SS Panzer Corps had held its battlefield throughout suffering only 5 total losses and 55 damaged tanks. The infantry, however, had suffered heavy losses.

The Soviet defeat was so complete that ROTMISTROW'S tank reserve could hardly play a role in the further summer battles. The Soviets later appointed a commission to fathom their own terrible losses at Prokhorovka. ROTMISTROW almost ended up in GULAG for his failure

success at Prokhorovka which the German leadership considered outstanding no coincidence

General ZHUKOV, based on his treason information about HITLER'S operational orders, had expected the German thrust on Oboyan and had made appropriate preparations. Thus, the Soviets had established positions in the frontal arc of Bjelgorod at a depth of almost 50 km. In the direction of Obojan, these formed a hollow alley precisely in the area of

HOTH's advance to the north originally envisaged HITLER and ZEITZLER.

In fact, on May 10 and 11, 1943 General HOTH and Marshal VON MANSTEIN had thoroughly examined this part of the Army High Command's operational plan for the 4th Panzer Army

In view of accurate German reconnaissance results of Russian defensive preparations on the future battlefield, HOTH wanted to deviate from the original plan document of the Army High Command¹. He therefore proposed a modified operational plan

Attempting to cross a river in the Obojan area with hundreds of tanks, in swampy terrain and under constant fire from Soviet tanks and artillery, looked like an instruction manual for disaster. HOTH and VON MANSTEIN therefore modified HITLER'S initial operational order and shifted the 4th Panzer Army's center of gravity away from Obojan toward Prokhorovka. A battle with the Soviet armored reserve in the Prokhorovka area was explicitly expected. This was to be defeated first, in order to be able to successfully carry out the attack in the direction of Kursk afterwards.

Either out of neglect, intent (defense against treason), or simply in the belief that such a measure fell within his own purview as Army Group Commander VON MANSTEIN decided not to discuss this major change in the deployment order with Rastenburg²⁻⁴

Thus, the spies at the Fuehrer's headquarters learned nothing! The result was the Russian near catastrophe by the >surprise-
< Meeting of the German and Soviet tanks near Prokhorovka.

In fact, by the second day of the Kursk battle, the Soviets had already had to draw on their strategic reserve because of problems in the southern part of the Kursk bulge caused in part by agent false reports

Originally, these armored shock troops were to be used only after a defensive battle had been won, during the general offensive planned later to serve as a momentum mass for the Russian attack all the way to the Polish border

This was now over, despite or because of the Russian leadership's foreknowledge of the Wehrmacht's intentions

After the German victory in front of Prokhorovka, only a small distance lay between Prokhorovka, the pincers of the II SS Panzer Corps and General BREITH's III Panzer Corps. BREITH, too, was close to a breakthrough on July 12.

ROTMISTROV, after his defeat by General HAUSER, WHICH was concealed from the public until the end of the old Soviet Union, faced catastrophe if there was another attack by the II Corps.

and III German Panzer Corps was to come. The Battle of Kursk threatened to be a German victory. However, especially in the southern part of the Kursk front, the Soviet air force increasingly noticeable. It could not stop the German tanks on its own, but it was enough to gain time.

Fortunately for the Russian leadership, the Anglo-American landing on Sicily had already begun two days before the tank battle of Prokhorovka. HAUSER and BREITH WERE not to compete!

The tank battle of Prokhorovka: Was there German foreknowledge here?

The tank duel at Prokhorovka has long been considered the decisive and greatest tank battle of all time.

However, this slaughter, which was not the largest tank battle of all time place,¹ as mentioned above, quite differently than is still widely portrayed today.²

Already on July 6, 1943, the Soviets had to fall back on their strategic reserve. One day later the Steppe Front the rear with the 5th Guards Army, the 27th and 53rd Armies, and the 4th Guards Army also put on the march. This was all the more astonishing because even at the beginning of the Battle of Kursk the balance of forces was so lopsidedly distributed in favor of the Soviets that, had the central front not been entrenched behind defenses hundreds of kilometers long, might have thought that the Soviets themselves were about to make a breakthrough.³

However, after the Voronez Front unexpectedly threatened to collapse for the Russians shortly after the start of >Operation Citadel< the Soviet reserve was to move in the direction of Pro-

chorowka set in motion. In doing so, the Soviet High Command wanted not only to stop "Operation Citadel", but to encircle and smash the German tank corps that had advanced, which would have corresponded to an annihilation victory. In this, the 5th Guards Tank Army was to play the main role. For this purpose, the chief of the 5th Guards Army was to cover a marching distance of 330 to 380 km to the area of operations in Prochorovka in a forced march within three days. A great marching performance of ROTMISTROV, which, however, should have a negative effect on the mechanical performance of his tracked vehicles and tanks.

However, the approach of the Soviet steppe front had not gone unnoticed by the Wehrmacht. German reconnaissance planes followed the many kilometers long forced march like the ravens of the Germanic god Odin. In fact, the gray-painted Ju-88-D Luftwaffe reconnaissance planes photographed the Russians right up to the start of the attack at Prokhorovka. They gave the German commanders a timely picture of what was brewing there.'

contrast, in the absence of accurate treason information from the Fuehrer's headquarters, Soviet tank commanders in the dark about what awaited them on the opposite side. Thus, Soviet General ROTMISTROV ATTACKED the Germans head-on, rather than on their flank—again, an indication of how heavily the Soviet Union relied on treachery and espionage in 1943.

The result was the "German target shooting on moving targets" concealed by the Soviets for decades. While the II SS Panzer Corps

did not record a single total loss of battle tanks and assault guns on July 12, 1943, the 5th Guards Tank Army forfeited 334 tanks and assault guns "Leibstandarte" Division counted 190 Soviet tanks left behind in the recaptured area in the confined space of a hill alone. The reported number seemed incredible at the time that SS-Obergruppenführer Paul HAUSSE, the commanding general of the II SS Panzer Corps, WENT TO the front to see for himself.

In fact, part of the German success in the "target shooting of Prokhorovka" was not only due to the superior range of the German tank guns. Soviet guardsmen later recalled that German weapons were accurately aimed at every critical point of the terrain and that the Wehrmacht had prepared ambushes and pak fronts. The enemy had precise knowledge of the location and strength of the Russian counterattack.

In contrast, the soldiers of the 5th Guards Tank Army did not know advance about the enemy to be expected, nor about the terrain itself.

This foreknowledge made it possible for the numerically inferior

German armored force at Prokhorovka was able to crush the Soviet tank force supposed to play a main role in the upcoming Soviet summer offensive.

This example from 1943, in which the strongest Soviet grouping was pitted against the strongest German grouping, proves what could have happened if the men of "Heeresgruppe Mitte" in the summer of 1944 and the defenders of Pomerania in February 1945 had been as well informed as the II SS Panzer Corps at Prokhorovka.

In fact, certain gentlemen had ensured that the opposite occurred.

Hitler's "second Dunkirk"? the background Germany's wasted victory at Kursk

When the German offensive "Operation Citadel" broke out on July 5, 1943, it quickly became clear that the loss of the element of surprise had led to severe disadvantages.

Thus, after four days of fierce fighting, a terrain gain of 18 kilometers, the attack of the 9th Army launched by "Army Group Center" from the Orel Arc, did not advance. One of the main reasons for the failure in the north was the restraint of its armored vehicles practiced by "Heeresgruppe Mitte". These were used only piecemeal. Also contributing to the failure in the north were conspicuous lack of coordination, hesitation, indecision, and a failure of leadership by some senior officers. Although Colonel General Model recognized these failures during the operation and sent more of his available tanks forward, it was too late to affect the course of events. One consequence of these tactics was that German tank losses in the north were very small. For example, Panzer Division 21 of the 20th Panzer Division suffered only three losses during the entire operation despite the heaviest engagements of its old Panzer IVs.^{1,2}

In contrast, in the south the attacking 4th Panzer Army and the neighboring Army Division KEMPF succeeded, after considerable initial difficulties, breaking deep into the enemy positions.

When the 9th Army was forced to cease its attack because of strong Soviet counterattacks on its northern neighbor, it was

However, after gaining almost 40 km of space in the south, the desired breakthrough

It was possible to form bridgeheads over the obstacle of the Psel River and repel counterattacks of the Red Army operational reserves near Prokhorovka.

With the possibility of attacking in open terrain, the longed-for

breakthrough into the depths beckoned and with it operational success. At that time, the commanders-in-chief of the Central and Southern Army Groups were recalled to HITLER's headquarters East Prussia for a meeting on July 10

Here HITLER confronted them with the news that the Western Allies had landed on Sicily on July 10, 1943, that the loss of the island was imminent, that further landings in lower Italy or in the Balkans were to be expected (misinformation Admiral CANARIS!). The attack on Kursk was therefore to be stopped immediately.

The German Luftwaffe had detected the first signs of Allied action early in the morning of July 9, 1943, when a Junkers Ju-88 reconnoitering the sea lanes between Malta and Pantelleria a large fleet of Allied transport ships and accompanying warships. Actually, this revealed everything, but an inexplicable number of precious hours passed before the successful discovery of the invasion fleet was relayed to the top. When this reconnaissance message was not communicated to HITLER until late in the afternoon of July 9, 1943, no one could doubt that the size of the fleet moving toward Sicily was not a decoy operation to cover primary landings in Sardinia and Greece. Earlier, an Allied deception effort supported by Admiral CANARIS had attempted, with moderate success, to hoodwink the German high command that Sardinia and Greece were the real targets. The situation became even clearer when, 24 hours later, details of the Allied invasion just under way in Sicily were communicated to HITLER at the afternoon Führer Conference.¹

At this point, however, HITLER DID not yet intend to end the Kursk offensive, although the war diaries of the OKH spoke of the fact that it would now become necessary to bring "Operation Citadel" to a rapid and successful conclusion²⁻³.

At the end of July 10, 1943, it became clear that the Italian defenders of Sicily were dispersing and that the still strong Italian Regia Marina had not the slightest intention of attacking the Allied invasion fleet off Sicily, as promised. In fact, the captains of the Italian battleships, cruisers, destroyers and speedboats were fully motivated to make a devastating attack on Anglo-Americans, hated since the Mediterranean battles at the most sensitive moment, when the troops were being unloaded. A treacherous naval leadership prevented this! As the Italian warships remained firmly moored to the anchor ropes in the ports, it was clear that MUSSOLINI's rule in Italy was about to end. Admiral CANARIS had been >wrong<.

As early as May 1943, HITLER had informed the OKH (Army High Command) to prepare for a rapid transfer of the II SS Panzer Corps to the

south in such an emergency. However, it was perfectly clear that even if HITLER had immediately terminated Operation Citadel*, the II SS Panzer Corps could not arrive in Italy before early August. This was too late for Sicily!

Already on 12 July 1943, the day of the victorious tank battle of Prokhorovka, there could be no doubt that Sicily could not be held without rapid and effective German support. As a result, on July 13, the commanders-in-chief VON KLUGE and VON MANSTEIN were summoned - to the Führer's headquarters. There HITLER told them he wanted to cancel "Unternehmen Zitadelle*" because of the critical situation in Italy and also to withdraw the II SS Panzer Corps there. VON MANSTEIN protested vehemently, stating that the battle had now reached the decisive point, "victory was within our grasp. decisive breakthrough was imminent, the enemy had been forced to commit a large part of its operational reserves at a very early stage. The counterattack could be beaten off. On the other hand, VON MANSTEIN had not yet brought his own reserve, the XXIV Panzer Corps. Thereby he proposed the "Operation Roland*. According to this the German armored units were to turn abruptly to the west instead of continuing northward or toward Prokhorovka in order to encircle a single-armed pincer movement of all Soviet troops standing in the southern part of the Kursk arc. The prerequisite for the operation was the

Deployment of the XXIV Panzer Corps in order to be able to intervene against possible new forces of the Soviets approaching from the east. VON MANSTEIN did not have the freedom of action to do this, since HITLER had placed deployment of the Army Group Reserve under his personal reservation. This corps comprised 181 operational tank and assault guns and, almost more important the situation¹³ motorized and mechanized infantry battalions

The Russian units were so battered that they were passive everywhere. All that was missing was a big final German attack

In the meantime, VON KLUGE considered it imperative to break off the battle for Kursk and to withdraw all formations to their initial positions. He had already withdrawn several divisions, including three panzer divisions, from >Operation t >Zitadelle< by the end of 12 July that any possibility of resuming the attack in the north became moot. He assured HITLER a day later that there was absolutely no question of continuing >Operation Zitadelle< or resuming it at a later date^{1, 2}

While VON MANSTEIN attempted to make preparations for >Operation Ro-land< in the southern front of the Kursk Arc¹³ to 17 July and carried out attacks that took place in the gray area of legality, on 16 and 17 July 1943 the final

Hiring order. Although they had still tried to inform HITLER as little as possible about the planned "Operation Roland <, the information about it had >accidentally< reached the Führer promptly. HITLER thus ordered the 4th Panzer Army to detach the 2nd SS Panzer Corps and assemble it in the Belgorod area.

"Modern historians are fully aware that the one-armed pincer, called "Operation Roland<, would probably have led to success. A German victory at Kursk was given away - with all the consequences for the course of the war.

Finally, in the exposed southwest corner of the Kursk Front, which until then had been in the shadow of events, there were only relatively weak Soviet troops. With the help of the III Panzer Corps and its Army Group Reserve, the XXIV Panzer Corps, VON MANSTEIN would have been shielded the westward thrust of "Operation Roland< to the east.¹

The cessation of "Operation Roland< caused horror among all those involved on the ground. Even the officers of MAN-STEIN's successful armored units, which were still fully prepared for attack, could not understand the meaning of this halting order. Similar to HITLER's HALT - order before Dunkirk, his forced halt of "Unternehmen Zitadelle* caused strong emotional reactions. Thus, the offensive against Kursk can be described as a battle broken off halfway, a decision "given away* shortly

before the climax

The background to HITLER's decision to abort "Citadel" was not only Italian, but was based on a false report from the General Staff's "Foreign Armies East" Division. Under the heading "An assessment of enemy intentions as soon as Operation "Citadel" is carried out," GEHLEN - informed HITLER: "We must expect that the Russians will launch offensives which they will carry out against the south wing and the center of this front as soon as the German offensive starts. We expect both a containment operation against the 6th Army and the 1st Panzer Army in the direction of the Donets Basin."

The last sentence of "Foreign Armies East", concerning the endangerment of the Donets Basin with its valuable industrial sites, was the decisive formulation. It made HITLER's action so predictable as soon as he had learned about alleged Soviet intentions! That these were already again false reports - who cared? Once again, General GEHLEN and Colonel VON DER ROENNE rendered a service to the Red Army.¹

Thus HITLER ended "Operation Citadel" just 13 days after its launch. Instead of destroying the hard-hit Soviet tank reserves, the Germans began a rapid retreat to their initial lines. The Soviet formations at Kursk, which despite all preparations were headed for a terrible defeat, could breathe a sigh of relief. To this day, even modern Russian historians claim the Battle of Kursk as their own victory. Strategically they are right, tactically not.

Incidentally, the II SS Panzer Corps was not transferred to Italy, but remained in the east.

Incredible: Who was behind the sudden withdrawal of Luftwaffe from the southern part of the Kursk Front?

The slowing of the Wehrmacht's attack tempo on the southern part of the Kursk Front had been largely caused by unbelievable events in the Luftwaffe.

As the offensive of General HOTH's 4th German Panzer Army neared its decision, German air support suddenly diminished.²

This was all the more astonishing since, with few exceptions, the Luftwaffe probably had air superiority for the last time on the Eastern Front during the "Unternehmen Zitadelle".

But this was of little use to the attacking units of "Heeresgruppe Süd", since the 8th Fliegerkorps already had to surrender 30 percent of its bombers, 50 percent of its battle planes, and 40 percent of its fighters in

support of MODEL'S 9th Army in the north on July 7. This represented a weakening not justified by anything. Who was behind this measure is unknown.

As if this were not enough, on July 9, just two days before the tank battle of Prokhorovka, the remaining bombers of the 8th Air Corps were also put entirely at the disposal of the 9th Army. Their attack, unlike the southern part of "Operation Citadel," had long since been halted by the Soviets. There, the additional planes were of no further use.

Besides, "by chance" numerous fighter planes were sent from Kursk to the distant Mius front. There must have been good reasons!

Also the Bf-109 fighters of the successful I. JG 52 had been transferred to the rear a few days before. There, in Poltava, they were certainly urgently needed!

Just when it would have mattered, the victorious >Heeresgruppe Süd< at Kursk had only one third of its air forces left at the beginning of the attack.

This could only have had a negative effect. Instead of only a correct and possible thing that would have been to hurriedly throw every German aircraft capable of carrying bombs into the promising breakthrough battle on the south wing of Kursk, the Luftwaffe had earlier developed this emphasis to perfection. Now, after several years of war, should everything have been forgotten?

This incident during the great offensive at Kursk also questions: Had it not been similar before Moscow in December 1941?

Thus it happened: Soviet airmen had just been hard pressed and able to breathe a sigh of relief due to the fortunate withdrawal of the Luftwaffe and even held air supremacy at the end of >Operation Citadel*. The price was paid above all: German supply convoys and the attack troops retreating back to their initial positions after the end of >Zitadelle<. In the process, a lot of valuable material which could not be transported to the rear in time because of the Russian air attacks.

What influence did the Battle of Kursk have on the overall World War II?

For decades, >Operation Citadel< was regarded by German and Allied historians as the lost decisive battle of the war. More recently, the >modern< German historians' guild tends to emphasize that the Battle of Kursk, despite its scale a large but hardly decisive battle that had been exaggerated beyond measure by postwar Soviet propaganda, outcome of the enterprise had been pre-programmed just as the decision of the war had been determined long ago. Anglo-American historians also claim that it was only the Allied landing on Sicily brought about real decision the East in favor of the Russians, since Germany had to throw its reserves from there to the South. There are history scribblers at work!

this way, the Red Army's undeniable advantage of having known the exact time and place of the last major German offensive in Russia well in advance can be wonderfully reduced.

In fact, at Kursk, with the exception of the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944, the Germans had succeeded for the last time in drawing together all their strategic reserves for an offensive operation.

In July 1943, the Germans had attempted to encircle and crush more than a million Soviet troops at Kursk. The Reich urgently needed more manpower to bring its war production back up to speed. Behind the front lines, numerous trains were already ready to transport the expected Soviet prisoners of war away to Germany for work.

The concept of >Zitadelle< was an offensive, which should serve for the own German defense. After a German victory, it was hoped to release at least ten large armored units. This was to create the first time, a true strategic reserve - quickly loadable and ready for use in other theaters of war¹

A probable German victory at Kursk without betrayal would therefore not have been a >lost victory<. It would have made it possible for Germany to

possible to wage a defensive war in the East and to keep the Anglo-Americans from entering >Fortress Europe< the West and South.

The outcome of the Battle of Kursk - tactically a German victory, but strategically nothing less than a defeat - had wasted all this.

It is undisputed that after Kursk the strategic initiative in the East passed irrevocably to the Soviet Union. This was to remain so until the end of the war.

However, the Wehrmacht achieved a partial success, because in Kursk, especially in the famous tank battle at Prokhorovka, German tank weapon was not broken, as the Russians had successfully propagated for

decades after 1945

Instead, after the end of the Soviet Union, it became known that the real losses of the Russians at Kursk had been kept secret like a state secret not without reason. They were so high that the Red Army had suffered total losses of more than 1600 armored combat vehicles. Up to 300,000 Soviet soldiers fell at Kursk and Orel. STALIN DID not reach the Polish border the summer of 1943, but a year later

Thus, the outcome of the Battle of Kursk prevented the effective formation of a German strategic operational reserve.

One can also put it this way: It was not the Anglo-American advance to Sicily that decided the Battle of Kursk, but Kursk that made possible the Allied landings in southern Italy in 1943 and in France in 1944.

By breaking off >Zitadelle<, HITLER also took the pressure off the Soviets and allowed them to reorganize their battered Voronezh and Steppe fronts. From now on, the Soviet High Command had a free choice of where to attack the weakened German front sections¹

C) Was the loss of Ukraine inevitable?

Why >Operation Rummyantsev< Could Set the Eastern Fire

The main blow of the planned Soviet summer offensive 1943 should start against Bjelgorod and Kharkov under the name of >Operation Rumjantsev<. 114,400 men, 2,418 tanks as well as 1,311 airplanes attacked the German defenders who were in hopeless inferiority

Already on the first day of the attack, the Soviets managed to tear a gap in the front more than 50 km wide by the evening of August 7, 1943. This was the first time in the history of the Red Army that an operational breakthrough was achieved through the use of tank armies.

Using all the German reserves, it was possible to stop the attacking Soviet armies, inflicting 500,000 casualties. Even though the Germans managed to stop the Russian steamroller once again, the city of Kharkov was lost for good.

The Soviet losses were so great that General ROTMISTROV'S 5th Guards Tank Army, rebuilt with new tanks and freshly trained crews, was again routed for the second time after Prokhorovka outside Kharkov. Of his 543 tanks at the beginning of the attack, just 50 remained here

A major part in the problems that >Operation Rummyantsev< caused to the German Eastern Front was played by the Abteilung >Fremde Heere Ost< of the German General Staff. Even one day before the start of the operation, it completely misstated the expected point of attack and the

time of attack.^{1,2}

As a result, HITLER and his generals were completely surprised by Rumyantsev. Only by massing all forces it was possible once again to prevent disaster and to achieve a defensive victory at great losses of terrain.

Refusal of Orders: Did Field Marshal von Kluge Enable the Soviet Advance to the Dnieper?

Dnieper River had become the fateful river of the war in the East. Behind it lay not only fertile agricultural lands, but beneath its black earth rested the most coveted treasures of the industrial 20th century: Ukrainian iron ore near Krivoy Rog, manganese ores and non-ferrous metals around Nikopol and Zaporozhye. Also, the Dnieper was considered an ideal armored ditch in front of the oil fields of Romania. If Germany could hold, the leadership of the Reich remained militarily and economically operational.

In the summer of 1943, the front was approaching this river. At a conference in Zaporozhye between HITLER and his leading generals, it became clear that Heeresgruppe Süd could hold the river front only if it received new forces. HITLER therefore promised VON MANSTEIN a corps of four divisions from Field Marshal KLUGE's Army Group Center. The corps was to be made available immediately at the seam between the two army groups to forestall the imminent danger of encircling MANSTEIN's north wing. The other divisions were to secure the most important crossings over the Dnieper.

HITLER had further ordered the immediate extension of the Dnieper line, also called Ostwall, on August 12, 1943. Using manpower from the population, this was to be tackled immediately on the largest possible scale.

Apart from symbolic local safeguards, however, nothing had happened: an omission reminiscent of similar events in the run-up to the Russian counteroffensive before Stalingrad. Those responsible remained in the dark.¹³

Marshal VON MANSTEIN, who was well informed about the prevailing conditions on the Eastern Front, suggested to HITLER on September 8, 1943, during his lightning visit to the Field Marshal's headquarters in Zaporozhye, to issue all the discussed orders already from Zaporozhye. But HITLER unfortunately did not send the relevant orders to Army Group Mitte until after his return flight to East Prussia. Another nail in the coffin for the German Eastern Army!

Army Group Center< was ordered to surrender the 4th and 8th Armored Divisions and two infantry divisions. Followed was the order of Field Marshal VON KLUGE DID NOT. A clear case of disobedience?

On September 14, 1943, the event MANSTEIN HAD expected Soviet troops broke through at the northern wing of >Heeresgruppe Süd< and stood shortly before the decisive Dniepr crossings

Due to KLUGE'S fatal refusal, Germany had missed any chance to bring the Red Army to a halt in front of the Dniepr by bringing in existing reserves

VON MANSTEIN accused the Second Army High Command, which KLUGE'S ARMY Group undisguised "over-rapid" evasive maneuvers and thus of being responsible for the crisis that had arisen at the seam between "Army Group North< and "Army Group South<. The letters of the Chief of Staff of "Heeresgruppe Mitte< to the High Command of the Second Army, discovered in a special archive in Moscow, show a similarity with the concept of military resistance, which the former Chief of Staff BECK revealed to the co-conspirator Wilhelm LEU-SCHNER IN 1943: "According to this enough confidants at command posts on the Eastern Front, who arranged for the withdrawal of their units without informing neighboring units. The result was that the Soviets were able to break into the gaps in the front thus created and roll up the front on both sides."¹ Hadn't same thing happened on the Dnieper front?

On September 15, 1943, Field Marshal VON MANSTEIN, with HITLER'S approval issued one of the most audacious withdrawal orders of the war. One million men, including Wehrmacht helpers and aid workers, had to be disengaged from a front torn in many places over a length of about 1,000 km, and then three armies with their 54 divisions to beat six bridgeheads to withdraw systematically across one of the largest rivers in Europe

On the other side of the river fan out armies as quickly as possible width of 700 km along the front before the Russians, who were pushing quickly, could gain a foothold on the western bank. If this maneuver failed, the German Wehrmacht faced defeat in the east, with a million men and the immediate loss of the war

The bold maneuver succeeded. Beyond the Dnieper, however, no promised defensive lines and bunkers awaited, but nothing but a few trenches and scrambled alarm units of dubious combat power.

VON MANSTEIN had once again succeeded in offsetting the consequences of KLUGE'S refusals to obey orders and sudden retreats. The renewed failure to build the >East Wall< on the Dnieper ordered by the

leadership in time was now to have disastrous consequences, for the Soviets had reached the river in many places even before the Germans. In the course of September, they managed to cross 23 of the 700 km of the river within a few days.

At first, weak combat groups of several German armored divisions and infantry divisions succeeded in sealing off the Soviets' most dangerous river crossings. Outwardly, the most threatening development was at the junction between >Heeresgruppe Mitte< and >Heeresgruppe Süd< at the Bukrin bridgehead.

After the Red Army was pinned down by the German defenses at Bukrin, the Russians took the bold decision to secretly withdraw their troops from this bridgehead and move them to Lyutesh, which was about 200 km away. For this purpose, the Dnieper River had to be crossed twice and the Desna River once. This was to be hidden from the Germans with radio interdiction and great secrecy. The Soviets claimed in the postwar period that this deception and misleading of the German leadership had been completely successful. Field Marshal VON MANSTEIN would not only not have withdrawn troops before Bukrin, but would have reinforced them.

In fact, the Soviet regrouping did not go unnoticed by the high command of the 4th Panzer Army. General HOTH'S war diary recorded that strong Soviet tank forces were crossing the Desna River and heading northwest. German reconnaissance also noted a massing of motorized Russian units in the Lyutesh area.

General HOTH even made the decision to smash this deployment by a tank strike. Mysteriously, however, HOTH'S attack was forbidden. Allegedly this was done by HITLER, a clarification of the real background would be interesting! Instead, the High Command of >Heeresgruppe Süd< (responsible for planning and operational questions was the Ia of the HG Lieutenant Colonel SCHULZE-BÜTTGER), after a mock attack by the Red Army near Bukrin, moved the fighting 19th Panzer Division to the south - away from Lyutesh - still on November 1. This weakened the 4th Panzer Army at Lyutesh at the worst possible moment. Apart from two reserve armored divisions, it had only eleven infantry divisions left, which were almost regimental in strength. Of course, it was all just coincidences!

Thus, Russian General VATUTIN was able to make his preparations undisturbed and launch the initiative to break through on Kiev from Lyutesh early in November.

According to the war diary of the 4th German Panzer Army, the long-awaited major Russian offensive began north of Kiev on November 3, 1943. After two Russian armies failed to make a decisive breakthrough on

the first day despite everything, this did not happen until the following day after the 3rd Guards Tank Army and the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps brought in

Another contributing factor was that the high command of >Heeresgruppe Süd< was allegedly unclear for days whether Ljutsch was an offensive with far-reaching objectives all

shifting away of reserves and the failure to recognize threat despite of existing knowledge - this, too, remained for

the responsible officers without consequences. We will find certain names in leading roles in the summer disaster of the

>Heeresgruppe Mitte< again.

When the threat to Kiev became apparent on November 5 and the Russians recklessly split their forces into two directions of attack, the Germans decided to counterattack

Armored German troops were thrown at the Sovietssave the Ukrainian capital, Kiev A surprise was waiting for them.

Mishaps and coincidences?The Bitter Loss of the Ukrainian Capital Kiev and the Last Great German Victory on the Eastern Front

Just two days after their breakout from the Lyutets bridgehead, the Soviet tanks of the 5th Guards Tank Army rolled across the Kiev boulevard Kravtschak on the night of November 6, 1943.

Almost nothing worked properly the German defense in the area north of Kiev. The armored German units, which were quite numerous, deployed partly in alleged ignorance of the situation development, the mass of the 19th Panzer Division was even withdrawn to the Bukrin bridgehead. Thus, 7th Panzer Division, the 20th Motorized Division, and the combat group of the SS Panzer Division >Das Reich< were pushed away from Kiev. 88th German Infantry Division had to pay the bill. It perished in the burning city.¹⁻²

The only thing that worked satisfactorily was the organization of the German Reichsbahn. Not one locomotive remained in Kiev, and when the last station was abandoned, total of 24911 wagons with clearance goods personnel of the German Reichsbahn and the field railroad commands

However, most of them were not to get far, because already on November 7, 1943, the Red Army captured Fastov, the ver-

The military base was located 50 kilometers southwest of Kiev. All the supply lines of the northern wing of Army Group MANSTEIN ran through Fastow

and had now come the clearance transports from Kiev. All the rolling stock stood on the tracks of the huge marshalling yard. Among them were 45 locomotives. None of the railroad material, so valuable in the East, could be saved: a disaster that raises questions.

Since the Third Guards Tank Army was already deep in the rear of >Heeresgruppe Süd<, it was now necessary to counterattack in the Fastow area.

On November 9, 1943, Chief of General Staff GUDERIAN had suggested to HITLER to abandon the previous bogged-down counterattacks and to combine all existing panzer divisions south of Kiev for the intended counterattack via Berdichev in the direction of Kiev¹

First, however, the situation had to be stabilized. For this purpose, the 25th Panzer Division was to save the situation together with the newly formed >Tiger<- Abteilung 509. The division had only formed in the summer of 1943 and had been transferred from Norway to France

Its commander was the capable General Adolf VON SCHELL, who had already made a good name for himself as an organizer (SCHELL program). However, his 25th Panzer Division had not yet grown together enough, had never fought divisional formation and had no Eastern experience. Late as the beginning of October 1943, the division had to surrender more than 600 of the new motor vehicles it had just received. 14th Panzer Division also been newly formed, destined for the Eastern Theater of War because the OKW and the OKH felt that the 25th Panzer Division would remain in France for a long time. While 1st Panzer Grenadier Regiment 146 had received new armored personnel carriers, Panzer Regiment 9 was not yet fully equipped. The radio equipment was incomplete. All deficiencies were known. Also, the gentlemen at the operational planning of >Heeresgruppe Süd< were fully informed about the condition of the division. They did not react.

Although the division would have needed at least another four weeks to be equipped with its new equipment and to be trained in a makeshift manner, it was hastily transferred to Russia.

Not enough with the unfinished state - now strange events occurred during the transport to the east. The transport sequence was changed several times on the way. The Panzer-Jäger detachment was distributed gun-wise throughout the transport - a completely uncharacteristic behavior

The "Army Group South" also behaved unbelievably. It determined

the discharge of the division's wheeled parts in the Berdichev-Kasatin area, that of the armored tracked parts in the Kirovograd-Novo Ukrainka area. At the same time, the 25th Armored Division remained unclear whether the artillery tractors and armored cars were counted among the former or the latter.

However, General VON SCHELL's division still had 90 Panzer IVs of Panzer Regiment 9 and was assigned the newly established >Tiger< Abteilung 509.

The equipment of this >Tiger< division was also not yet completed. Nevertheless, the division possessed an inventory of 45 combat-capable >Tiger< tanks. After all, together with the Panzer IV tanks of Panzer Regiment 9, this amounted to 135 battle tanks. This would have given the Germans a good chance of beating the Russians at Fastov, who could not field much more than the same number of far weaker T-34 tanks in this area! Actually, nothing could have gone wrong!

When the wheeled parts of the 25th Armored Division were removed out of Berdichev to advance on Fastov, their armored units no longer there. Incredibly, they had been forwarded by rail transport to the southwest 24 hours earlier, and at that hour they were at Kirovograd station, 200 km from Berdichev. Armored parts had not been stopped by responsible persons at the 4th Panzer Army.

The >Tiger< Division 509 also complained of strange occurrences. When the division received orders on November 7, 1943, to assemble at Fastov and occupy the higher ground south of Fastov, the 2nd Heavy Panzer Division 509 had been unloaded at Kasatin and marched as far as Skavir. As a result, the tank battalion was fragmented into different groups for more than 300 km!¹³

Coincidentally, change of commanders had also ordered that previous commander had already left, the new one, Major GIERKA, was still in Italy.

While Kasatin was reached by the first elements of Division 509 on November 4, 1943, during the next two days the

because urgently needed spare parts were missing. But they had long since been sent out of the Reich!

Thus it came about that on November 10, 1943, two formations yet fully trained and splintered by systematic transport failure to a now superior enemy even in. In the end, the grenadiers, artillerymen, and sappers of the 25th Panzer Division had to advance alone with the few >Tigers<. Nevertheless, these remnant forces managed to advance as far as the Fastov station before being engaged by rus-

Transport via Fastov, which was then still in German hands, continued to Mironovka, 50 km north of Kirovograd, where it came to a halt. During the night it went back to Aleksandrovka. There the crew of the locomotive disappeared with the locomotive, and the train with the >Tiger< tanks remained motionless. Then, when a new locomotive arrived, it first went back to the north.

All this meant that for the counterattack now postponed November 9, 1943 just 18 operational >Tigers< of Panzer Abteilung 509 were ready to attack Fastov. The units of Abteilung 509, which were spread over 300 km, were missing vital supply material, sufficient communication links as well as map material, apart from their commander.

The delayed rail transport of the 25th Panzer Division as well as the "Tiger"-Abteilung 509 were no coincidences, but in the area of the >Heeresgruppe Süd< also verifiable one year before during the battle for Stalingrad.

Rolf HANNO, who later became a graduate engineer and architect, reported on an incisive experience he had with a comrade mid-December 1942. At that time he was supposed to secure a transport of four wagons from Snamehka to Stalino. The transport of the wagons had the most urgent transport stage. HANNO'S orders were to go immediately to the station commander upon arrival at a railroad junction to get him to immediately attach this transport to the next freight train bound for Stalino. By chance however, HANNO discovered only scrap metal was being transported in the wagons. In two wagons there were insulating bells, and in the other two they had loaded office furniture. At the railroad junction at Kasatin, south of Kiev HANNO then went to the station commander and told him that his transport had the most urgent transport level, but would contain only scrap metal. The four wagons were then parked at Kasatin on a branch line, small station some 50 km to the west. It was clear to HANNO that this was one of the methods of obstructing supplies needed to liberate Stalingrad. Those responsible were never apprehended and continued undisturbed a year later.

With such conditions it is not surprising that the Inspector General of

the Panzer Forces, GUDERIAN, reported after a visit to "Heeresgruppe Süd" on December 2, 1943, that two thirds of the tanks of "Heeresgruppe Süd" were lying around,

so much pressure had to vacate the city again. General VON SCHELL was - recalled by HITLER after the destruction of his division.

Nevertheless, the two German units managed to stop RYBALKO's southward assault. VON MANSTEIN WAS thus given time to bring in new forces for a massive counterattack. STALIN'S chance to destroy "Army Group South" - help of German traitors and saboteurs faded away, although the Red captured the town of Zhitomir with its large supply depots of the 4th Panzer Army

VON MANSTEIN had now gained sufficient time for a counterattack. He attacked with the 48th Panzer Corps, a shock group of

no less than 6 armored divisions and several grenadier divisions, south of the Fastov-Zhitomir line four Russian armies and two independent corps

Things could have turned out quite differently, for November 9, 1943, - General GUDERIAN had suggested to HITLER that he combine all the panzer divisions available south of Kiev for his counterattack. But the objection of the local front commanders prevented HITLER from following GUDERIAN'S suggestion. It would have been interesting to see arguments the

The aim was to verify the validity of the statements made by the front-line commanders, unless they were intended to do otherwise.

Nevertheless, the 48th Panzer Corps achieved surprising successes "Operation Advent". Despite only 201 operational tanks and assault guns against nine armies, including two tank armies, one tank corps and one cavalry corps of the Red Army, the Germans managed to recapture Radomysl, Korostyn and Malin as well as Zhitomir.

According to eyewitnesses, the Russians were completely baffled by the ghostly German tank thrusts, which seemed to come out of nowhere and were unpredictable. On December 18, 1943, the 1st and 7th Panzer Divisions and the SS Panzer Division

"Leibstandarte" between Malin and Meleni, and it seemed to come to a classic surprise operation of a "miniature Tannenberg"

However, on December 22, 1943, when the 1st and 7th Panzer Divisions were about to close the cauldron for good, a location map of a fallen Soviet major was captured by chance. Its markings showed that apparently no less than three Soviet armored corps and four rifle corps were holding out in the Kessel somewhat puzzling that now, instead of putting trapped shock-stricken enemy out of action, the bold pincer attack called off again. Whether the attack, if continued, would not have led to a miniature Tannenberg remains as unknown today as exact circumstances of the termination of Operation Advent."

Here, signs of a strange kind of "demoralization from above" emerged in "Army Group South," as Hitler lamented von MANSTEIN. Indeed, the Reichskommissar Ukraine said to have reported to the Führer that defeatism was spreading in MANSTEIN's headquarters.¹ During World War II, this was one of the most serious accusations on the German side, but also on the Russian side, and could result in the harshest state sanctions.

Consequently, the Germans had achieved a considerable victory against completely superior enemy forces and able to make considerable gains in terrain. However, the actual goal of throwing the Soviets back onto the Dnieper and retaking Kiev was no longer achieved.

The Soviets had lost 168,716 men in the Battle of the Dnieper by December 23, 1943. The German troops were also so exhausted that most of the officers and almost all of the NCOs had dropped out. Trenches of the Wehrmacht were so thinly manned that the deployed soldiers could not see their neighbor from their one-man hole.

Now it was not only the reduced number of operational combat vehicles. Due to a lack of personnel replacements from home, the "Army Group South" had only 328,397 men at end of December 1943.

This was the first sign of a development to contribute significantly to the demise of "Heeresgruppe Mitte" summer of 1944.